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GORE RANGE - EAGLE'S NEST

PRIMITIVE AREA

ARAPAHO NATIONAL FOREST

and

WHITE RIVER NATIONAL FOREST

COLORADO

Prepared by:
Kremmling District
Arapaho National Forest
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EXPERIMENT STATION

INTRODUCTION

The Gore Range - Eagle's Nest Primitive Area lies only 90 highway miles west of Denver, Colorado. Its 61,000 acres are within the Arapaho and White River National Forests. This area, one of the most scenic in the west, is composed of vast areas of virgin forest, cascading streams, deep clear lakes, abundant fish and wildlife and one of the most rugged mountain ranges in Colorado, made up of a mass of sharp-pointed peaks, crests, and ridges. Great masses of snow perpetually lie on the almost vertical sides of this range.

Mt. Powell, 13,534 feet, is the highest in the area. There are 17 peaks over 13,000 feet, 33 over 12,000 feet, and 40 - 11,000 feet-plus in elevation. The elevation of the whole Wild Area ranges between 8,500 feet and 13,500 feet with a median elevation of about 11,000 feet.

The Gore Range - Eagle's Nest Primitive Area offers fascinating rewards to the outdoor enthusiasts: hikers, fishermen, hunters, campers, and climbers.

A network of 11 trails, totaling approximately 80 miles, is maintained by the Forest Service to provide access to most parts of the Primitive Area. These trails for the most part, are concentrated in the northern end, although there are several trails in the southern part, both east and west of the Divide. Except for two trails, one at each end of the area, none of the existing trails cross the main range. Horses for riding and packing can be obtained locally. In order to maintain the primitive nature of the area, jeeps and trail scooters are not permitted.

For the fisherman there are 10 major streams and 15 large lakes, plus numerous smaller lakes and streams. Most of these are accessible by trail, but ones not on the trails are fished less often and offer a better catch. The lakes provide better fishing than the small, cold, rapid-moving streams. Eastern brook, black spotted native, and rainbow trout are the most common species of fish, but other species of trout have been stocked and are occasionally caught.

Big game such as mule deer, elk, and bear are often seen by the observant hiker or hunter. Rocky Mountain sheep are also present in the higher more inaccessible parts of the Primitive Area. Eagle Nest Mountain derives its name from the numerous Golden Eagles nesting near the peak.

Small game in the area are snowshoe hares and grouse and in addition, fox, beaver, mink, marten, coyotes, and weasel occur in limited numbers. Many other species of small animals such as coney, ground hog, squirrels, and chipmunks also abound. Several bands of domestic sheep, attended by a herder may be observed on the west side of the range.

For the climber, there are several challenging peaks in the Primitive Area. Major Powell, the first to climb Mount Powell, said of the mountain, "It is but a few feet lower than Long's Peak, and the climb equally as difficult and tedious." Eagle Nest Mountain, elevation 13,397, also presents a formidable foe to the average climber; however, it would not appear so to the technical climber.

The precipitation averages between 25 and 30 inches annually. Most of this occurs in the form of snow. Rain during the summer varies considerably from year to year. June and September are usually rather dry. Summer storms are mostly of short duration and a long rainy period is unusual.

Temperatures normally range from a minimum of about minus 30° during the winter to a maximum of about 80° during the summer. Nights are always chilly and frost occurs throughout the year.

The trails into the area are normally open between June 1 and October 1, but much of the higher country is not free of snow before July 1. Storms in the high country may be expected any time after September 1.

In 1866, Bayard Taylor, author and world traveler, crossed the Williams River Range at Ute Pass. He describes the view of mountains, later to become the Primitive Area, as seen across the Blue River:

> "Opposite to us...rose huge mountain-foundations, where the grassy openings were pale, the forests dark, the glens and gorges filled with shadows, the rocks touched with lines of light - making a chequered effect that suggested cultivation and old settlement. Beyond these were wilder ridges, all forest; then bare masses of rock streaked with snow, and highest of all, bleak snow-pyramids piercing the sky."

The Gore Range bears the name of a baronet and sportsman, Sir George Gore of Sligo, Ireland, who in 1855-57 made an extended hunt in the Rocky Mountains. His party comprised of servants, cooks, and even United States soldiers, was guided by the famous trapper and scout, Jim Bridger.

ELLIOT RIDGE

The Elliot Ridge Road is one of the few 4-wheel drive roads going to the Primitive Area Boundary. To reach Elliot Ridge, one takes Forest Service "Spring Creek" Road 201 west from Colorado Highway 9, just north of Green Mountain Reservoir. (In going from the highway to Elliot Ridge, you pass through five vegetative types: sagebrush, aspen, lodgepole pine, spruce-fir, and alpine. This gives an excellent opportunity to observe the different vegetative types due to the change in elevation.)

When you reach the alpine zone on Elliot Ridge, there is a good view of the surrounding mountains. This is a good starting point for those mountain climbing enthusiasts who plan to climb Eagle Nest Mountain or Mount Powell. Here, also, one can take a trail into the Piney Lake area

to the west or into the Cataract Lake area to the east.

For a short side trip, the road into Mahan Lake is worthwhile. The Gore Range trail, also, starts on this road.

Travel time by 4-wheel drive vehicle from the highway to the Wild Area Boundary is about one hour.

CATARACT AREA

This area is one of the most scenic with Mount Powell and Eagle Nest, the highest mountains in the Primitive Area, forming a back-drop for the many beautiful mountain lakes, Eaglesmere, Tipperary, Surprise, Cataract, and Mirror Lakes are easily accessible by trail.

Nearly a dozen other lakes are available to those willing to hike cross-country. Many good sized fish are still to be found in the less frequented lakes.

This area is accessible from Heeney on Green Mountain Reservoir by way of a good gravel road. The road crosses the Gore Range trail about four miles from the reservoir. Taking the trail north of the road, one can go to Tipperary, Surprise or Mahan Lake, which is outside the Primitive Area. This trail section climbs above Cataract Lake and crosses the lower portion of the rugged boulder strewn Cataract Creek. This cascading stream has its origin in the snow fields on the high ridges west of Eagle Nest Mountain. A trail leading to this high country can be reached by going either north or south at the Cataract Creek road. The trail climbs 3,380 feet in the 12 ½ miles from Lower Cataract Lake to Elliot Ridge where the trail crosses over into the Piney Creek area. This upper Cataract trail starts between Tipperary Lake and Surprise Lake on the Gore Range trail. Traveling along this trail, one comes to Upper Cataract Lake, a deep lake set at the base of Eagle Nest Mountain. Just a short distance below this beautiful lake is Middle Cataract Lake, well known for its fishing. Continuing up this trail, one crosses the rugged Cataract Creek and comes to Mirror Lake. It is an easy grade from here to the top of Elliot Ridge. From the top of this ridge, one has an unsurpassed view of the Colorado Rockies.

For an enjoyable loop trip, leave the Cataract Creek road on the Surprise Lake trail. Go to Surprise Lake and then north, past Tipperary Lake on the Gore Range trail to the Cataract Creek trail, and back to the starting point. This circle trip will take between three to four hours by horseback and six to eight hours by foot.

A worthwhile side trip would be to go to Upper Cataract Lake, which would take about one and one-half hours to reach. One should be able to hike from Lower Cataract Lake to Elliot Ridge in six to eight hours.

BLACK CREEK AREA

This mountainous area is heavily forested with spruce and pine. The mountains rise sharply from cascading Black Creek. At many places along the trail beautiful views of Black Lake and the surrounding mountains can be seen. A trail climbs along Black Creek into an area seldom visited. Many lakes teeming with fish await the hardy hiker willing to go cross-country to reach them.

This area cannot be reached directly by public road. One can reach Lower Black Creek from the Cataract Creek Road and the Surprise Lake trail in four to six hours by hiking and two to three hours by horseback. Black Creek can also be reached by taking the Lost Lake trail starting at the Heeney road. Lost Lake and Upper Black Creek can also be reached by this route. Travel time from the Heeney road to Lost Lake is three to four hours by foot, and one and one-half to two hours by horse. To reach Upper Black Creek from Lost Lake, it takes two to three hours by foot and one and one-half hours by horseback.

SLATE CREEK AREA

Slate Creek drainage is rolling and gently sloping from the Gore Range trail to the Primitive Area boundary. West from the boundary, the terrain becomes very rugged with large granite outcrops. The trail up to the Slate Lakes is steep and rugged. Traveling by horseback is not recommended on this section.

The two Slate Lakes are located in a high mountain valley. From the trail to Upper Slate Lake, one can look down on the lower lake and the entire valley below. Fishing is good in both Slate Lakes and even better in the high lakes above Upper Slate Lake, where the trail ends.

Public access is not available up Slate Creek except by consent of the private landowner. One can reach the Slate Creek trail on the Gore Range trail. The best way to reach Slate Creek from the south is by taking the Boulder Creek Road and trail to the Gore Range trail. Travel time is two and one-half to three hours by foot and one to one and one-half hours by horseback. Slate Creek can also be reached from the north by taking the Lost Lake trail from the Heeney Road to the Gore Range trail. Travel time from this direction is three and one-half to four and one-half hours by foot and two to two and one-half hours by horseback.

BOULDER CREEK AREA

This area has several beautiful streams and lakes to offer the hiker. Taking the road from Boulder Creek Campground on Highway 9 and continuing by trail to Boulder Lake, one passes through an area where railroad ties were cut in the early days. Many signs of this activity are still visible today. It is an easy hike to Boulder Lake and an excellent access

trail to the Gore Range trail. Although not in the Primitive Area, the country around Boulder Lake is of a primitive nature and would be enjoyed by fishermen and hikers alike. The trail follows the rocky stream above Boulder Lake for about one-half mile. There are many beautiful alpine lakes on Boulder Creek beyond the trails-end. As one leaves the trail and continues up along the stream's edge he enters the Primitive Area. These high lakes, the source of Boulder Creek are not visited very often and provide good fishing in addition to beautiful scenery.

It will take about one and one-half to two hours to reach Boulder Lake by driving and hiking. In another one and one-half hours the average hiker should be able to reach the majority of the high lakes.

NORTH ROCK CREEK

The road along North Rock Creek goes within one quarter of a mile of the primitive Area boundary and terminates at an old abandoned mine. This road, Forest Service number 207, starts across from the Blue River Campground on Colorado Highway 9. This is one of the few roads that cross the Gore Range trail. North Rock Creek is easily accessible and provides fairly good fishing. The high lakes above the Old Boss Mine at the end of the 4-wheel drive road offer even better fishing for those willing to hike to them.

This road provides an excellent opportunity for one to see true primitive areas without hiking a great distance. Only four-wheel drive vehicles should be taken to the end of the road; however, the lower half is accessible to automobiles. Driving time from Colorado Highway 9 to the end of the road is about one hour.

Hiking time from the end of the road to the upper lakes is about two hours.

NORTH WILLOW CREEK

Willow Lakes are clear, cold mountain lakes nestled just below high mountain cliffs. There are several lakes in this group and they are often ice-filled til midsummer. The fishing is fairly good in the fall.

A good, easy trail leads to the lakes starting from private land on Highway 9. Permission must be obtained from the landowner before crossing his land.

Salmon Lake is also accessible from this trail and is worth the one-quarter mile walk. This trail also provides access to the Gore Range trail.

Hiking time from Highway 9 to the Gore Range trail is one and one-half hours; to Salmon Lake, two and one-half hours; and to Willow Lakes, three hours.

MAIN GORE - DELUGE CREEK

The trail up Gore Creek leaves U.S. Highway 6 at the Gore Creek Campground. The first three to four miles, up the creek bottom, are fairly gentle. The sides of the valley are steep and rugged. The last two miles up to Gore Lake are very steep.

There is no trail to Deluge Lake. To reach this lake go up the Gore Creek trail about two miles and follow Deluge Creek which comes in from the left or north side of the trail. The last two miles up Deluge Creek, to the Lake, are steep and rugged.

The Zodiac Spires are along the crest of the Gore Range at the head of Gore Creek. It is also possible to cross the Gore Range at Wilkerson Pass. This pass connects Main Gore Creek and South Willow Creek.

Red Peak, elevation 13,183, is one of the few named peaks in this range. It is accessible from the head of Gore Creek.

PITKIN CREEK

The trail up Pitkin Creek leaves U.S. Highway 6 near the white ranch house at the mouth of the creek. Permission should be obtained before crossing this private property.

Pitkin Lake is about 6 miles from the highway. It is located above timberline on the left hand fork of Pitkin Creek, near the head of the Valley. Fishing is fair to good in this Lake.

BOOTH CREEK

Booth Lake sets near timberline at the head of Booth Creek. The trail to the Lake leaves the highway at the mouth of Booth Creek and is about five miles long. From the head of Booth Creek there are several "stock trails" that can be followed to Piney, and Middle Creeks.

SPRADDLE CREEK

A four-wheel drive road, Forest Service No. 3099, leaves U.S. Highway 6 opposite the parking area at Vail. It winds through brush, aspen, lodgepole pine and on into spruce-fir area. The area near the end of the road was logged between 1922 and 1935. The road ends near the base of Bald Mountain.

From the end of the four-wheel drive road it is possible to follow a sheep trail into Middle Creek and on into either Red Sandstone or Piney Creek. The Spraddle Creek area is steep but it is not as rocky and rugged as the terrain to the east. There is no fishing in the Spraddle Creek.

RED SANDSTONE CREEK

Forest Service road No. 3097 leaves U.S. Highway No. 6 one mile west of Vail and follows Red Sandstone Creek. About 4 miles north of U.S. No. 6 the road forks. The road to the right goes to the Red Sandstone area and the one to the left goes to the Piney Creek area.

The Red Sandstone road continues on another mile and forks again. The left hand road goes to the vicinity of Lost Lake and the road to the right goes on to the divide between Middle Cr. and Red Sandstone Cr. Both forks of the road go through an area that has been logged from 1942 to the present.

There is no trail from the right fork of the road however, it is possible to follow Red Sandstone Creek, Middle Creek or the ridge between the two on into the primitive area. This is probably the best route into the upper Piney Lakes. Anyone wishing to go into this area should check with someone who knows the area.

The left hand road goes to within about one mile of Lost Lake. A trail leaves the road and goes to Lost Lake and continues on to Piney Lake. It is possible to follow old logging roads on up Red Sandstone Creek and then go cross country into the Primitive Area.

PINEY LAKE

To reach Piney Lake and Piney Creek follow the Red Sandstone Road No. 3097, four miles to the first fork in the road. Take the left fork, No. 3092, for about three miles to another fork. Take the right hand fork, No. 3095, to Piney Creek. From there a four-wheel drive road can be followed along the creek to Piney Lake. From Piney Lake there is a trail to Slate Ridge and a fisherman's trail following Piney Creek on to the head of the drainage.

TRAILS IN THE WILD AREA

FOREST SERVICE TRAIL NUMBER	NAME	TERMUNII
1889	Piney Lake	Forest Service Road 3090 to Piney Lake
1894	Main Gore Creek	U.S. Highway 6 to Willow Creek Trail
59	Boulder Creek	Colorado Highway 9 to Primitive Area Boundary
60	Gore Range	Willow Creek to Mahan Lake
61	Cataract Creek	Forest Service Road 13005 to Gore Range Trail No. 60
62	Surprise Lake	Forest Service Road 13005 to Surprise Lake (Via Gore Range)
63	Cataract Lake	Gore Range Trail to Elliot Ridge
64	Black Lake	Gore Range Trail to Upper Black Creek
65	Slate Creek	Gore Range Trail to Upper Slate Lake
36	North Willow Creek	Gore Range Trail to Willow Lakes
37	Wheeler Lake	Wheeler Junction (U.S. Highway 6) to North Willow Creek
2082	Booth Creek	U.S. Highway 6 to Upper Booth Creek
	Pitkin Creek	U.S. Highway 6 to Pitkin Lake & Upper Pitkin Creek